

No. 15. Preparation for the Sacrament.

1st Corinth. 11 Ch. 28th V.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

The sacrament of the Lord's supper being a personal banquet and communication, as it were, with Jesus Christ, it will naturally occur to us, that, before we presume to become his guests, we ought to examine our hearts with impartial care, in order to know whether we are qualified to appear in his divine presence.

Our Church, in its invitation to the heavenly feast, requires of its members that they examine themselves, and amend their hearts and reform their lives, before "they eat of that bread and drink of that cup." For, when we receive the holy sacrament, we make an utter renunciation of all our sins—we enter into a public engagement to lead, henceforward, a virtuous & religious life—we sacrifice upon God's Altar, all the bewitching pleasures which have estranged our minds

(2)
from God, and "we become one with Christ, & Christ
"with us."

It is intended in this discourse to shew in what
the examination, required by the Apostle, consists, and
then earnestly to exhort you so to fit and prepare your-
selves, that "you may be worthy partakers of that holy
"Sacrament."

The necessity of treating upon this subject will
instantly appear, when we reflect that many people
receive the sacrament without once considering "what is
"required of them who come to the Lord's Supper?" It
is unquestionably the duty of every Minister of the Gos-
pel to satisfy the doubts and remove the scruples some
persons entertain respecting that holy Ordinance. But,
in order to prevail with our hearers to celebrate it, we are
not to represent it as a thing of little moment; we are
not to pollute the sacred fountain of eternal truth.—
What the Scriptures authorize, "that and that
"only are we to preach." When we celebrate the com-
munion, we naturally expect that all who partake of

(3)
it will lead lives suitable to the obligations they lie themselves under; we naturally expect that the sacred elements, "the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ," will not be received in vain. And since we do not perceive "the fruits of good living" so generally produced as might be expected; since we do not discover the suppression of uncharitableness, hatred, and variance; since we find lying, deceit, swearing, intemperance to be almost as prevalent after as before receiving the holy Sacrament, it is our duty, as we are to answer to God, to shew what qualifications those are expected to have who would be worthy receivers of the Blessed Sacrament, & also to urge every one who frequents the courts of the Lord's house, with zeal and affection, to receive it as often as he has opportunity.

As the time is approaching when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, I pray God that those who have hitherto lived in the neglect of it, may consider seriously with themselves of what spiritual sustenance they have deprived their souls; & that those

(4)

those who receive it may all become "patterns of good works!"

And 1st. As we declare in the presence of God our having repented of our past sins, it behoves us to examine whether such declarations be just. By repentance we are to understand an entire change of mind: instead of delighting in sin, the man who has repented delights himself in the Lord.—Every Communicant, therefore, should examine whether this change be wrought in his disposition: and if it be not, he may be assured he has not "truly repented of his sins." The man who would examine himself to good purpose, and with full effect, will enter into the depths of his conscience; he will bring to light all his secret sins; he will consider the obligations Christianity lies upon him to integrity of conduct and piety of life. Debaased with shame and penetrated with reverence, he will perceive the goodness of God no less signally displayed in his work of Redemption, than in his acts of Mercy and instances of Forbearance. What

ever was the colour of his former life—however notorious he might be for injustice, oppression, deceit—repenting of his sins, he becomes a new man, and, of consequence, leads a new life. The fountain from which issued only the waters of bitterness, is now a well of life. The tree, which for many years had nothing on it but leaves, pruned & digged, now yields its fruit good to the taste and pleasant to the eye. In every worthy Communicant, whose former life has been irregular, the same blessed change is produced; and to every man, who does not reform a wicked life, whether he receives the Sacrament or not, may be applied the words of our Blessed Saviour, "it had been good for that man if he had never been born."

(2dly) We are to enquire "whether we have a stedfast faith in Christ our Saviour." By faith, in the New Testament, is meant a full conviction of the truth of Christianity. And who that believes Jesus Christ died on the cross to expiate our sins, will not, himself, henceforth, "die unto sin and

"live unto righteousness?" But merely to give
 our assent to the truth of the Gospel—for who in
 this sense is not a believer?—is not christian faith.
 Unless our belief in revelation prevail with us to keep
 God's commandments, most assuredly we have not the
 proper qualifications for a worthy receiving the Lord's
 Supper. "For as the benefit is great, if with a
 "lively faith we receive that holy Sacrament, so is
 "the danger great in proportion, if we receive the same
 "unworthily—if we receive it without hearty re-
 "pentance and true faith." In a worthy participa-
 tion of those holy mysteries we are to believe God sets his
 seal to the pardon of our sins; as if He said to every
 Communicant, "son, be of good cheer, thy sins be for-
 given thee." Such a faith as this will produce in
 us "a thankful remembrance of his death," will raise
 our "affections to things above," and will have such
 an influence on our lives as to excite us "to give all
 "diligence" to walk worthy of being for ever happy
 with God in heaven.

(3dly) To a true repentance and lively faith, we are to add perfect charity. In examining our hearts we are to judge ourselves whether we forgive every one that hath offended us, & whether we are really reconciled to them. "Christ hath done great things for us, whereof we rejoice," & He expects us in return "to love one another." How natural it is when we are commemorating his wonderful love towards us, that "we should forgive, as we ourselves are forgiven;" that "as we expect forgiveness of our offences at God's hand, so we," from the bottom of our hearts, "should forgive every one their trespasses against us!"

But there is one essential part in the duty of self-examination, which, I fear, is often omitted, I mean Restitution. Our Church directs us "to make restitution and satisfaction to the uttermost of our power for all injuries and wrongs done by us to others, before we presume to partake of the holy Sacrament." Have we traduced the characters of our neighbours by vile insinuations? We are to make them

(3)

restitution, by acknowledging, at least, the malevolence of the motive, or the wantonness of the act. We are to reinstate them in the opinion of those whose favour they may have forfeited, and whose kindnesses they may have lost. Or have we defrauded others of their property, either by the artifices of deceit, or under the sanction of custom? Whatever we have gained unfairly, we are to restore. Whatever we have got, if we are not fully persuaded God will approve the manner in which it became ours—if we shall be ashamed of having the transaction discovered before the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth—if we should consider the same treatment towards ourselves as unjust and extortionate—we are to return, to whom it of right belongs, all we have acquired by fraud, or obtained by imposition. If then, restitution and satisfaction constitute a worthy receiving of the Sacrament, some men, I am apprehensive, will refuse to receive it.—Will not such men, for the same reason, refuse to die? Be assured the man who cannot receive the sacrament

(9)

worthily, cannot die with comfort. And if he has not amended a vicious life—if he has not a lively faith in Jesus Christ—if he has not forgiven all who have offended or have injured him—if he has not made restitution and satisfaction for all injuries & wrongs done to others—as he cannot celebrate the sacrament with a proper disposition, so he cannot die without distraction and horror.

We have seen the examination we should make of our hearts before we approach the holy Table. Would to God it were as duly performed, as it is indispensably required! But it is very evident that many people go to the Sacrament, not because they are properly prepared, but, because they have been brought up in the custom—because they think it decent and proper—or, because they abstain, for a little while, from some excesses they usually run into. To such men, let me suggest what our Church supposes, that “they have truly and earnestly repented of their past sins; that they are in love and charity with their neighbours;

"and that they intend to lead a new life."—

If any objections be made to the rigour of this doctrine, let me reply to them in one word. The doctrine which has been delivered is the word of God. And the design of this discourse is to prevent men from celebrating the Lord's Supper unworthily—to prevail with you to be prepared to receive the Sacrament, as you would wish to be prepared against the approach of death—as you would wish to be prepared to receive it when you stand on the brink of eternity!

Having shewn what examination is necessary previous to our receiving the Blessed Sacrament, I shall earnestly exhort you to put the duty in practice, & then to "eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

Every man who commemorates the death of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament should consider himself bound by an oath—the most solemn of all obligations—to become a good man. As on Aaron's mitre was inscribed, "holiness to the Lord," so the subsequent conduct of every Communicant ought

to be the evidence of his having communicated worthily. If "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uxah for irreverently putting forth his hand & taking hold of the ark of God"—which was designed to represent God's dwelling amongst the Jews—"and the Almighty smote him for his rashness that he died"—how much more does a Christian render himself liable to the wrath of God by profanely rushing into his presence, and appearing at his Table—if, "being unjust, he continues to be unjust still, and being filthy, to be filthy still?" The condemnation of the Jews, in profaning the Pasover, which was a type of the blessed Sacrament, "that soul shall be cut off from Israel," would prevent all men, one would suppose, from receiving the Sacrament without due preparation. Let me therefore beseech you, my brethren, by the love you have for your souls, by the gratitude & affection you feel for your Redeemer in saving you from everlasting misery, by the hopes you have of being happy for ever with Him in Heaven, let me beseech

you to examine yourselves with care & impartiality; let me prevail with you "to mortify your members
 " which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness,
 " inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetous-
 " ness, which is idolatry: to put off anger, wrath,
 " malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your
 " mouth, before you presume to eat of that bread and
 " drink of that cup."

Happy would it be for the world in general—
 inexpressibly happy would it be for each Communicant
 in particular—could we perceive, that, after the ad-
 ministration of the Holy Sacrament, drunkenness,
 swearing, dishonesty had forsook our habitations, & in
 their room, that sobriety, seriousness, integrity, had
 taken up their abode with us. We might then address
 every Communicant with this pious salutation, " now
 " is Salvation come to thine house."

Let it not be said that you will abstain entirely
 from the sacrament, in order that you may not in-
 cur the danger of receiving unworthily. What I do

you expect to be saved by refusing to comply with the
 last and most solemn command Jesus Christ delivered
 to all who expect Salvation by Him? To those who
 absent themselves from the sacrament, because they say
 they are not worthy—we apply the language of our
 Church, "why then do ye not repent and amend?"
 You will not condescend, perhaps, to answer the ques-
 tion now—but, why ye did not amend your lives,
 ye are to answer one day at God's Tribunal—and be
 assured "it will make the ears of every one" to whom
 it is proposed, "to tingle." Jesus Christ, "our great
 High Priest," expressly says "do this in remem-
 brance of me"—The Apostle exhorts every man, be-
 fore he complies with the injunction "to examine him-
 self;" but there is no where to be found an exemp-
 tion from the duty. Sufficient notice is given that
 you may judge and determine for yourselves, whether
 you will pay obedience to the Redeemer of your souls,
 and also whether you will comply with the injunction
 of his Apostle. If you refuse to receive the Sacrament

you are without excuse; if you refuse to examine yourselves, to repent of your sins, & believe the Gospel, you are without excuse also. Our Saviour, speaking to the Jews of the day of judgment, says, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out:" so when ye shall see all the worthy Communicants in the kingdom of God—and you yourselves, who either received unworthily or refused to receive at all, shall be shut out, you will, assuredly, have more, much more abundant cause "of weeping, of wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Let me rather prevail with you, my Beloved Brethren, to examine yourselves, and then, to eat, without apprehension, of that bread and drink of that cup.

May God endow us all with the resolution "to search and examine our consciences, and that, not lightly and after the manner of dissemblers with Him; but so that we may come holy and clean to

" the heavenly feast, in the marriage garment required
 " by God in holy Scripture, and be received as worthy
 " partakers of that holy Table !"

Theoph^o. J. St. John. 7

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